

Grocery Business Invests in a Healthier Neighborhood

Issue

The 18th Street Deli and Grocery is the only grocery store on the north side of Ellensburg, Washington in Kittitas County. Before last year, they had a typical corner store inventory—alcohol on two aisles, lots of snacks high in salt and fat, and only one basket of fresh produce. All of that changed in 2010 with a surprising remodel.

Bob Hood owns the 18th Street Deli and Grocery. He made a difference in his community with the help of the Kittitas County Public Health Department and a grant from “Communities Putting Prevention to Work” (CPPW). CPPW provides federal stimulus dollars for towns and cities to make changes that encourage healthy eating, more physical activity, and reduced tobacco use. Projects that receive funding focus on policies and neighborhood changes that are shown to be effective in reducing obesity and smoking.

Intervention

“We’re a community grocery store. Neighborhoods are important. We believe everyone is our neighbor until they tell us differently.” These are Bob Hood’s heartfelt sentiments. He is part of a movement to create healthy corner stores. The idea is that people can only choose to eat healthy food if they have a place to buy it. With the help of a data map, local health department staff contacted stores in low-income areas of the county and encouraged the owners to apply to be part of the healthy stores project. A community advisory committee reviewed the applications and selected Bob Hood’s store to receive technical and health promotion support.

In spring 2011, Bob closed his adjoining restaurant that served pub food. He used his own money to renovate the space, replacing the store’s aisles of alcohol with refrigerated cases. He stocked fresh produce and over 1,000 frozen food options that are low salt and low fat. He also removed all tobacco signs and placed tobacco products out of sight. The local health department did outreach to the neighborhood to generate interest. They provided signs and educational materials to promote fresh produce and whole grains.

Impact

Sales at the 18th Street Deli and Grocery increased. The community embraces the change. Bob Hood and his family continue to demonstrate their commitment to their neighbors. For example, when they found out that the only way to get fresh produce at a decent price was to show up at the wholesaler at 4:00 a.m., that’s what they did. Now residents on the north side of Ellensburg are making healthy choices right in their neighborhood. CPPW funding and the close partnership with the health department are helping to transform their community.

County population: 40,915
Ellensburg population: 18,174

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